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## How the Sandwiched Generation Manages Work and Family Demands

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If you are caring for your children and aging parents at the same time, you are a member of the Sandwiched Generation. You face multiple challenges in making your life manageable. A Portland State University (Oregon) study of dual-earner couples in the Sandwiched Generation uncovered some interesting strategies used by these couples. Researchers asked more than 300 couples nationwide what changes and accommodations they made to manage their work and family demands.

### **Making work “work” for you**

The couples in the study made a variety of changes in their work situations to better manage their multiple demands. The strategy used most often—and that generally was most successful—was to develop a flexible work arrangement. Many people, particularly women, chose jobs that allowed them flexibility to deal with family responsibilities, both planned and unplanned. One woman developed a job-sharing situation with a co-worker who also had children. Others reduced their work hours or requested a compressed workweek, such as working four 10-hour days a week. One man reported, “I work four 10s, so I have Fridays for the kids. It helps because I’m there on Fridays for them.”

Some couples made even more radical changes, including quitting a job to care for children and/or parents full-time, changing jobs or even careers, and starting home-based businesses.

Other research has found that working at home can blur the boundaries between work and family. Sometimes individuals who work at home end up working even more than they did before. If you decide to work from home—some or all of the time—develop some boundaries. For example, you might designate a work area in your home or only work during certain hours.

### **The family manager**

The Sandwiched Generation couples in the study were very creative and resourceful in managing their work and family demands by making changes in their family situation. Some couples reported that having each member of the couple work a different shift helps them manage, because someone can be home for the children and/or parents at all times.

Another successful strategy is to enlist the help of family members. For example, aging parents who are able can watch the kids. This frees up time for the couple and can strengthen the bond between grandparents and grandchildren.

Getting the kids involved in household chores also helps and instills a sense of self-reliance in the children. One mother said, “I just want them to be able to do their own cooking and be able to iron a shirt if they want to iron a shirt. I don’t want them to be helpless in that area.”

Others have looked to siblings for help with their aging parents; some have moved closer to other family members to take advantage of their support and assistance. Siblings can be an important source of emotional support, as well as practical support with aging parents.

### **Changing elders’ living arrangements**

While not for everyone, having a parent move in with you also can solve some problems. One man who was caring for his aging mother was looking for another home that would accommodate her. “We feel it will be much easier to have her right there rather than have her keep up an older home and a yard.” Other people felt it was easier for parents to maintain their own housing or to move to an assisted living facility where they would be well cared for. A variety of living arrangements can be effective, so consider the options, from home and community programs to supported living and institutional programs.

### **What’s the right answer?**

There is no “silver bullet” or “cure-all” when it comes to managing the demands of work, children and aging parents. Each situation is unique, so evaluate your needs and demands and figure out what will work best for your circumstances. Be aware of the options that are available to you. You’ll find a wealth of information at local libraries and on the Internet. Be open and communicate with your spouse, children, parents, siblings and supervisor.

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